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ST. JOSEPH, FLORIDA.

The prominence which has been given to St. Josephs bay of late owing to the tendency of the Western roads to find an outlet on the Gulf, so as to connect their lines with the Panama Canal, makes the history of this once famous place interesting to the readers who delve into the conditions of the past. The railroad from Iola to St. Josephs city is sometimes spoken of as the first railroad in Florida. This is a mistake. The railroad from Iola to St. Josephs was built in 1836-37 while the road from Tallahassee to St. Marks was built in 1833-34. The road from Tallahassee to St. Marks was the third railroad in the United States. While St. Josephs cannot boast of the first railroad in Florida, she can boast of having had the first Convention for the organizing of a colonial government seven years before the Territory was admitted to the Union. The Territory was admitted in 1845 and this convention was held in 1838. It is stated in an old newspaper that twenty trains of cars entered St. Josephs each day.

The following account of the founding of this remarkable city which at one time had a population of over four thousand was written by an old citizen who passed to his rest a few years ago. Some citizens of Middle Florida and southern Georgia conceived the idea of founding a city on the bay of St. Josephs in West Florida about twenty-five miles west of Apalachicola. At that time Apalachicola was the seaport for all the counties of southern Georgia lying contiguous to the rivers Apalachicola, Flint, Chattahoochee and Chipola, and for the counties of Middle and West Florida bordering on these streams; with the exception of the short road from Tallahassee to St. Marks, there were no railroads in Florida or Georgia.

The connection with the states lay north of Georgia at Georgetown, South Carolina. Therefore as there were

no railroads traversing the country between the Mississippi and the Atlantic, the commerce of this extensive country was carried on through the Gulf ports and the ports of St. Marks, Apalachicola, Pensacola and Mobile were busy marts crowded with the snowy sails of a great ocean traffic. The shipping of the port of Apalachicola could not approach nearer than sixteen miles to the city in consequence of the shallow channels which intervened between the city at the mouth of the river Apalachicola, and the deep waters of St. George's Sound at the west pass. All the freightage of the country inward and outward was carried to the shipping in the lower sound by the dangerous, tedious and expensive medium of barges. To avoid this therefore and to secure a port free from all obstacles was the moving cause for the founding of the city of St. Josephs.

Among those most active in this undertaking was Colonel George Grattan Gamble of Leon County. Colonel Gamble, among his other avocations and attainments during an eventful life, had mastered the profession of civil engineer. He had large experience both as engineer and builder of canals in his native state, Virginia; being at one time President of the State system known as the James River and Kanawha Canal Company. Embarking in this undertaking with all his characteristic zeal and energy he thoroughly examined the territory lying along the banks of the Chipola and Apalachicola Rivers, and by a series of levels ascertained that from Iola, some twenty-five miles north of the bay of St. Josephs, the land sloped in an unbroken inclined plain to the waters of the bay and that a canal could be constructed with very little excavation. He therefore advocated constructing a canal from Iola to St. Joseph. So very slight was the variation between the site of the proposed city and the river at Iola, he believed the canal could be built without locks, simply making the embankment higher at one end and having an inland front to the city where the boats

could land their produce. He proposed to have wharves at both sides the city, on the bay and on the back at the canal basin. These wharves would be connected with a line of road. The city would thus present the novelty of having the traffic of many rivers, conveying the products of several states brought to its doors on its inland front while its seaward face could receive ships bearing the flags of the maritime nations of the world.

Colonel Gamble also proposed to connect Lake Wimico with the city by another canal thus giving the city a supply of healthy fresh water. But Colonel Gamble was ahead of his time and generation. His co-laborers decided to build a railroad from Iola and another to Wimico or rather the bayou. This scheme was carried out and for several years trains ran regularly between Iola and St. Joseph much to the detriment of Apalachicola. At one time it appeared as though St. Joseph would entirely destroy the trade of Apalachicola. But Colonel Gamble's predictions were verified. The unloading of the steamers at Iola and the transmission by rail proved expensive and troublesome and elicited the bitter opposition of the steamers because they lost the freight from Iola to Apalachicola. The city began to languish, but its fall came sooner than was expected even by its enemies. It was before the days of quarantine. People knew little then about infection and took absolutely no care to prevent the spread of disease. One day an infected ship, from some isle of the greater Antilles, entered the port and very soon yellow fever made its appearance in every part of the city. The mortality was terrible. Tallahassee lost many of its citizens who had gone to spend the summer in the healthy and pleasant town. Here Governor R. R. Reed caught the fearful malady which ended his life; among others was the wife of Governor Duval, the mother and sister of Colonel G. H. Ward, Judge Allen and many others who fled from the city only to reach home and die.

St. Joseph grew to have a population of over four thousand. It was the metropolis of Florida. Cosmopolitan in character it attracted people from many states who came either to enjoy the gulf breezes or to engage in business. The people were energetic, active and stirring. It became a place for pleasure seekers and much wealth was congregated there. Fine buildings and large hotels adorned the city.

One writer who attended the Convention of 1838 thus speaks of the city: "It was then a stirring busy place, its citizens full of energy and hope, fine buildings and hotels adorned the town and more were building. The fact of its being selected for the meeting of the Convention speaks loudly as to its existing attractiveness. Before the city lay one of the most beautiful of ocean harbors with crystal, flashing waters and snowlike beach crowned with verdure to the waters edge; to seaward bounded by towering forest clad hills whose varied profile was made more picturesque by the large ships lying close to their base, was a vision of beauty ever varying with shifting light and shadow." It was not long after the city had been depopulated by yellow fever, a forest fire spread to the city and every house was burned to the ground. Nothing was left. Many had died and the remaining few who still felt an interest in the pleasure seeking city refused to go back, the rails of the road were torn up and sold, and thus ended the once beautiful city of St. Joseph.

